

Dear Judge Coughenour,

I am writing this letter to hopefully give the Court a better sense of who I am, how I came to be before the Court, and the changes I have made since I was confronted in May 2019.

I was prescribed Xanax for anxiety in 2014 after suffering a series of mental breakdowns that prevented me from working or living a normal life. I was suddenly struck by repeated panic attacks. I would feel like I was dying and was afraid that I had something terribly wrong with me. I ended up in the emergency room more times than I could count. I struggled to pay for appropriate mental health care and as a result I even ended up in a psychiatric hospital twice. A doctor at the psychiatric facility agreed to see me on an outpatient basis without me having to pay. They prescribed me antidepressants, sleep medication and Xanax. This medication worked and allowed me to live relatively normally for a few years. I was working again, I had a good relationship with my family and was able to provide a good healthy living situation for myself. Things were difficult still but manageable. In 2017 doctors changed their policies on prescribing benzodiazepines and I was suddenly unable to get medicine for what was still a major mental health issue for me. At first I purchased benzodiazepines on the streets from whoever had them but I wanted to have more control over the supply of my medication. I researched how I could go about providing it for myself and found a "recipe" that worked for me. For a time I simply created my own medicine and life went on. I found that many other people suffered from the same problems that I had and so decided to make and sell to them. Things got out of hand. I bought a pill press and sold the pills I made on a website known for illicit pharmaceuticals. This was obviously a huge mistake and one that I deeply regret. I understand how counterfeit medications can harm people and put them at risk but at the time I couldn't see that as they were the thing that allowed me to carry on life with some semblance of normalcy.

Whilst I was doing this I sought out therapy for my anxiety out of a desire to control what I was going through without the need for medication. After some time in therapy I was able to eliminate my need for the medication and developed the skills to manage my anxiety through a combination of lifestyle choices, change of diet and meditative control techniques. My life is significantly better now and I have control over my feelings and behavior that I haven't had in many years. I was ready to be done with my reliance on substances and the anxiety that I felt knowing that I was doing something that was illegal. It was a short time after this that I was served the warrant and informed that I would be charged. It was actually a relief when I was confronted as I told Detective Fischlin the day they searched my home. It felt like a lifted burden even though I knew I was in considerable trouble.

In the time since that happened I have completely changed my life. I am substance free, regularly attending therapy to maintain the progress I've made and I am looking to move into a more productive and professional stage of my life once I am able to complete

whatever punishment the court deems appropriate. I have begun to do independent journalism on the subject of politics, criminal justice reform, homelessness and the issues that cause people to become homeless. In doing so I have seen first hand that drug use is almost always an enormous factor in people becoming homeless and preventing them regaining their lives. This has caused me even more shame over what I did and hammered home the desire to stay on the path I'm on now and to help others to do the same. I see now that what I did was not only illegal but extremely foolish and for that I will probably forever feel a significant amount of shame and disappointment in myself. This situation has been a wakeup call that I have heeded seriously and I have no intention of ever returning to the irresponsible and reckless behavior that got me into this. My goal in life now is to provide for my family, my wife and my daughter who turned 13 in August and to be a good example for her. I am deeply sorry for what I have done and I am asking the court to recommend a sentence that allows for me to continue with the progress I've made. I am asking the court for the chance to prove that what I am saying is not just lip service but that I have truly changed for the better. I am asking for a second chance.

Nikki Armstrong